

5

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The Rapid Transit Public/Private Partnership Steering Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, September 10, 2003, from the Executive Co-ordinator, York Rapid Transit Plan:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information by Committee and Council.
2. Council endorse the Communications Strategy (*Attachment 1*).

2. PURPOSE

One of the most important determinants of success of public or private sector programs and projects is the level of public support. To be successful in meeting the goals and objectives of York Region's rapid transit program, a clear and consistent strategy must be developed to explain the program and its benefit to the residents and businesses of York Region and to the GTA generally.

This report outlines the Communications Strategy developed for York Region's rapid transit plan.

3. BACKGROUND

Each approach to achieving the objectives articulated in the communications strategy must be assessed on a cost/benefit basis. Communications for YRTP will be coordinated with existing York Region Transit marketing and communications initiatives to ensure optimal effectiveness in terms of both message and cost.

On July 15, 2003, the consortium received six proposals, which were reviewed by a Branding Steering Committee appointed to evaluate proposals. The proposals were evaluated and ranked based on consideration of the following factors:

- The responsiveness of the firm's proposed approach.
- The key staff proposed to manage the program.
- The qualifications and relevant experience of each firm.
- The value provided by the proposed approach with regard to fee.

Three firms were invited to give presentations on July 23, 2003. The Selection Committee further deliberated and, after checking firm references, has selected Gee Jeffery and Partners to enter into negotiations to undertake the branding work required for YRTP. Negotiations to confirm the final scope of work and work plan are currently underway with a view to contract commencement early in September 2003.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The development of the York rapid transit initiative requires communication support for activities that occur within three main areas: *Quick Start*, the Environmental Assessment process, and the development of the full rapid transit system.

During the first year of the York Region rapid transit program, communication was primarily focused on discourse among professionals, experts, government officials and readily-identifiable stakeholder groups such as local employers and chambers of commerce. The notable exception to this was the communication effort undertaken as part of the public process related to the Environmental Assessment studies ongoing along the transit corridors.

With the full commitment of funding for *Quick Start* from all three levels of government, the focus of communications in the coming year expands dramatically to incorporate a larger outreach effort into the community. While the requirements for providing detailed technical communication in support of continued program funding remain, the message universe now includes a new set of public stakeholders who need to learn about the program, buy in to it and, eventually, get on board.

An overarching goal of the communications strategy is to facilitate the creation of a set of emotionally compelling messages that will generate support for YRTP and prompt behavioural change in individuals. These messages will:

- Increase the motivation of team members to champion the project at every level.
- Develop champions outside the project team.
- Make people get out of their cars and avail themselves of the services provided by YRTP.

The communications plan identifies strategies in the following five areas, each of which is discussed briefly below.

4.1 Branding

A key aspect in the communication of the program is the development of a brand identity for rapid transit. The development of a brand will clearly define the message(s) to be conveyed that will get everyone on board. On June 26, 2002, York Consortium 2002 issued a request for proposal inviting six firms to submit proposals to undertake the work required to develop a brand identity for York's rapid transit program. York Consortium 2002 has retained Gee Jeffery and Partners to develop a brand and marketing communications strategy for York's rapid transit program. These will assist in the launch of *Quick Start*, be coordinated with the marketing communication efforts of York Region Transit and will evolve to form the basis of communication for the full rapid transit system.

4.2 Public Awareness and Education

Individual residents, business owners and employees are all included in this key stakeholder group. The goal is to develop and maintain public awareness and support and, ultimately, to increase transit ridership by increasing the profile of YRTP and public transit in general. Strategies include the continued development of a community outreach program, the enhancement of the YRTP Web site (www.yorkinmotion.com), approaches to providing support for the ongoing Environmental Assessment process, the development of an education campaign for children, and activation of a speakers' bureau. As part of the community outreach effort, YRTP will be participating in a series of community events (fall festivals, fairs etc.) taking place across York Region over the next several months. This will build on the recent success of YRTP's participation at the "Taste of Asia" Street Festival held on Sunday, August 3, 2003.

4.3 Government Relations Strategy

Building on the success of obtaining funding for *Quick Start*, the thrust of the government relations strategy in the coming year focuses on obtaining the funding required to build the full rapid transit system. The ongoing involvement and support of senior levels of government are critical to the continued success of YRTP. Many of the efforts undertaken to secure *Quick Start* funding will be repeated, including rounds of meetings with politicians and political staff at both levels of government and in various departments and ministries. The goal is to continue to increase political awareness, understanding and support by supplying timely and accurate information to politicians, political influencers and government officials, and thereby not only secure the approvals and funding necessary to advance the full system, but also to do so expeditiously. As required by the federal and provincial funding agreements for *Quick Start*, a protocol and process for communication coordination are being developed to ensure that all existing and future communications materials give appropriate acknowledgement to the contribution of these two levels of government to the funding of the rapid transit program (appropriate signage must be maintained on construction sites etc.).

At the municipal level, coordinated messaging and the dissemination of information among all stakeholder agencies and local governments are important to obtaining buy-in and support. All contact with agencies will be monitored and tracked to ensure that messages and information are consistent.

4.4 Media Strategy

The mainstream news media greatly influences public opinion. In order to favourably position YRTP in the eyes of the public, a media strategy integrated with other YRTP communications initiatives (e.g. public participation in the Environmental Assessment process) has been developed. The objective of the strategy is to encourage more accurate, balanced reporting in the mass media about the YRTP. The communication strategy identifies key media targets and outlines a series of media generation tactics, story opportunities and proposals aimed at achieving the media objectives. With the continued involvement of the Region's Corporate Communications Services Division, which manages all media contact on behalf of the Region, the focus over the next twelve months is to utilize various media tactics and avenues to launch a series of "good news" stories

about YRTP and Quick Start. Among the media tactics which may be employed: press releases around the achievement of key project milestones (funding announcements, Environmental Assessment open houses/submissions/approvals, design/build contract, ground breaking events); press stories around unique aspects of the program (focus on innovation, team profiles); “Touch & Feel” events with smart cards, shelter prototypes etc.

4.5 Internal Communications

In addition to the need for external communication, and as important, is the need for internal communication within the project team. As front line communicators who begin the process of spreading the rapid transit message through their day-to-day roles, project team members must be kept abreast of important project developments. A key part of the success of YRTP is ensuring that the information requirements of the very large project team assembled to undertake this aggressive program are met. These informational needs include both the transfer of data from one project area to another to facilitate the coordination of work efforts, as well as more general communication “talking points” as each team member has a role as a front line communicator/ambassador for the program outside his/her specific job.

4.6 Implementation

The step-wise rollout of the communication strategy is timed to take into account deadlines for program requirements, external announcements, requirements pursuant to the Environmental Assessment process and the completion of key background information and materials. Detailed communications plans being developed include: marketing communications (brand/identity), general public outreach, education, community/business group outreach, ongoing funding.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

All communications efforts are included as part of the YRTP budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipal communications staff continues to be invited to participate on the YRTP Communication Committee to ensure they remain apprised of current activities as well as to assist the YTRP team in evaluating the effectiveness of ongoing communications activities.

The marketing communications plan developed as an outcome of the branding process is anticipated to energize the communications program for YRTP and particularly the launch of Quick Start in 2005. This will in turn benefit transit as a whole, creating corollary benefits for YRT.

7. CONCLUSIONS

It is recommended that the Steering Committee of the YRTP and Regional Council endorse the Communications Strategy.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(A copy of the attachment referred to in the foregoing is attached to this report and is also on file in the Office of the Regional Clerk.)